

June 10, 2012

Commencement Address by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, At the Ohio State University, June 10, 2012

Good afternoon, everyone.

President Gee, thank you for your warm welcome and your outstanding leadership. The Ohio State University is mighty lucky to have you - again. If anyone out there doubts that public education can meet today's challenges, just come to the home of the Buckeyes.

I'm honored to be part of your 400th commencement-the last class to hear those bells. I'm also excited because your invitation allows me to bring back to campus, for the first time since his graduation, a proud Buckeye who's very special to me. That's because I trust him every day with my life. I'm talking about the guy behind me, with the earpiece, Matt, Class of '93, the head of my security detail. Now that I've blown his cover, he's going to be pretty mad at me.

I also rely everyday on another great buckeye, Josh Black, class of 1998. Josh is the author of the toughest sanctions regimes the UN has ever adopted. He is truly a national treasure.

You know, I can't help but notice: this is a slightly larger crowd than I usually get at the United Nations Security Council. Just the graduates outnumber me 10,000 to one. This is really great. I get to hear The Best Damn Band in the Land. I get to see the stadium that will soon witness the greatness of Urban Meyer. And, someone might even get me to talk a little trash about that team from that state up north.

Ok, let's get down to business. Job One is to congratulate the Class of 2012! Give it up for our graduates. I hope you're as proud of yourselves as we are of you. But let's be clear: today is officially the last day of your lives when it's OK to be caught in a robe after noon.

As a mom, I have to insist on another huge cheer - for the parents and the families that helped you get here today. You all have raised these amazing graduates, inspired them, supported them-and, when needed, given them a swift kick in the butt. This is your day too.

Now, I want to talk about the Buckeye spirit and the American spirit-about what makes America great and what will keep America great.

And the short answer is: you.

In today's economy, nothing predicts individual success more than a good education. And those who have a higher education also have a higher obligation-to give back and help keep America strong.

I know many of you worry about what's next. But your Ohio State degree is the best tool you have to live the American dream-to work hard, raise a family, own a home, send your kids to college, and pass on more opportunity to the next generation.

That's how it happened for my family and me.

My late father was a proud man- one of the legendary Tuskegee Airmen, an economics professor, a senior official at the Treasury Department and the World Bank, and ultimately, a Governor of the Federal Reserve System. That all came despite ferocious odds. You see, he was born in 1919 in segregated South Carolina. But when he was a teenager, he got to attend the City College of New York-a great public institution like this one. He graduated, got his MBA and his doctorate, and then worked with passion and patriotism to serve his country and the world.

My mother's parents emigrated from Jamaica to Maine in 1912. My grandfather was a janitor, but he still managed to send four sons to Bowdoin College and my mother to Radcliffe, where she became student government president. And Mom has devoted her career to making higher education more accessible to all.

So when I think about education, I don't just think about my kids. I think about my parents as well. Education is the force that let them compete fair and square. Their lives remind me that, while America hasn't always lived up to the promise of equality, when we demand it, when we work for it, America's founding values have a way of always winning out.

And we citizens, all of us, owe a powerful debt to our great nation that doesn't limit our horizons to the accidental circumstances of our birth.

Ohio State is more than a top academic university. It's a reminder of what is truly exceptional about America. This year we mark the 150th anniversary of the land-grant system - powerful proof that American innovation drives American greatness, starting in our very heartland.

To compete in the 21st century, we need universities like Ohio State-schools that offer a widely accessible world-class education.

And, to compete in the 21st century, we need graduates like you-young people fired up and ready to lead in a world of furious change.

We face serious challenges, from climate change to nuclear proliferation to economic competition from rising powers like China, Brazil and India. I know some folks argue that America just can't keep up-that the strengths we showed in the 20th century won't cut it in the 21st.

But don't you dare believe it. Don't believe it.

As President Obama recently said, "If we rise to this moment in history, if we meet our responsibilities, then-just like the 20th century-the 21st century will be another great American Century."

I believe that fiercely. I always bet on America. That's why I'm in public service-because America will always be the indispensable nation in world affairs, and because there is nothing we cannot achieve when we come together in common purpose.

Just look at the challenges we've tackled while you've been in school. Because America led, no one will ever again be threatened by Osama bin Laden. Americans are no longer fighting in Iraq. Al-Qaeda is on its way to defeat, and our amazing troops are responsibly ending the war in Afghanistan. Our alliances are stronger than ever. The world is ratcheting up the pressure on Iran and North Korea for defying their

international obligations. And when I visited Libya last year, people were not burning American flags- they were waving them.

We are in the early years of the next great American century. That's because we still have the resilience that has always carried us through tough economic times; because we still have a military without equal in human history; because we still have partnerships and institutions that let us share the burdens of global security; because we still have the dynamism that created the airplane and the iPad; because we have the can-do spirit that stormed the beaches at Normandy and stamped footprints on the moon; and because we still hold self-evident the great truths that inspire people from Syria to South Sudan.

But we can't have a new American century without new American leaders. And that, Class of 2012, is where you come in.

Just as the world needs America to lead, America needs you to lead.

To compete in a knowledge-based global economy, we need the world's best-educated workforce. We need innovators who'll create not just new jobs but new industries, such as through OSU's Technology Commercialization Office. We need doctors and scientists who'll defeat diseases and save our warming planet. We need mathematicians and engineers who'll invent magical new technologies. And we need outstanding teachers who'll inspire the next generation.

This is a huge day for you. But it's also about more than you. It's about our leadership in the world, which rests on your leadership here at home. It's about honing your skills, raising your game, and opening your heart to service. That's why Ohio State's motto is so powerful: *Disciplina in civitatem*-education for citizenship.

We live in an interconnected age-an era where no dictator should sleep easy, a time where ideas cross the globe with the tap of a screen. Some of us live in comfort, peace, and freedom; but billions more thrash against tyranny, strife, and despair. So we need your leadership to help reduce these dangerous divides, to defend human rights, and bring hope to the broken places of the world.

But we also need you to renew and rebuild here at home. So ask yourselves: what kind of America do you want to live in when your own kids are graduating from college?

Is it an America where men and women earn the same pay for the same day's work? An America where whom you love and choose to marry is no longer fodder for political debate? An America where chronic illness can't lead to chronic poverty? An America where college is accessible and affordable for all? An America where the energy we consume no longer threatens our climate? An America with more good jobs and an economy that remains the world's largest?

Whatever your vision, lead in making it real. As President Obama has said, "Ours is a story of optimism and achievement and constant striving that is unique upon this Earth. And that is why the rest of the world looks to us to lead." From Tunisia to Tahrir Square, young people aren't just leading revolutions; they're revolutionizing leadership. And so can you.

It's been a little while since I left college. Along the way, I've learned 10 lessons that have served me well. Allow me to conclude by sharing them with you.

Number one, always put family first. They are your strength and foundation.

Second, always challenge yourself. Get out of your comfort zone. You're too young to take the easy road.

Third, go travel-get dust in your hair. Take advantage of OSU's Global Gateways.

Fourth, learn more languages-to see the world through other's eyes.

Fifth, focus on what stirs your soul. It's hard to excel at anything that you don't truly love.

Sixth, be fearless. It's difficult to make progress without ruffling a few feathers.

Seventh, don't be afraid to go down fighting if you're fighting a righteous battle.

Eighth, very important, never want something so badly that you do something you don't believe in to get it.

Ninth, don't sweat what other folks may think of you. As Dr. Seuss said, "Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter, and those who matter don't mind."

And tenth, be about more than the money. Comfort and economic security, they're good, but they're not enough. You should be about creating change, not just counting it.

Class of 2012: look around you. One of you may win a Nobel Prize in physics. One may become the editor of a great newspaper. You may be surrounded by CEOs-maybe even a couple of rock stars. You could be sitting next to a future ambassador or an astronaut.

Ohio State graduates have done every single one of those things. So you can go at least as far as they did. You now join the distinguished alumni of The Ohio State University who have contributed immensely to the making of the United States of America.

You will each travel your own path from this place into the next American century. I know that can seem daunting, even lonely. But that's the Ohio State way, and it's also the American way-always tackling new challenges, always extending the reach of opportunity, always expanding the circle of liberty, always working together to forge a more perfect union.

Class of 2012, when we look at you, we see the future of the country we love. That gives us great faith and even greater hope.

We're rooting for you. We believe in you. We're counting on you.

Good luck and Godspeed.

Thank you very much.

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